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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION IN ABKHAZIA, REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

INTRODUCTION

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to the statement of the President of the Security Council regarding the situation in the Republic of Georgia, dated 10 September 1992, which requested me to inform the Council periodically of the developments in Abkhazia (see S/24542). The report describes intensified efforts by the United Nations to seek a settlement of this conflict following the appointment of my Special Envoy for Georgia, Ambassador Edouard Brunner of Switzerland (see S/25756).

I. MY SPECIAL ENVOY'S MISSION

2. My Special Envoy undertook his first mission to the Republic of Georgia from 20 to 25 May 1993. In Tbilisi, Ambassador Brunner and his team met with Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, the Chairman of the Georgian Parliament and Head of State. The mission also conferred with Mr. Tengiz Sigua, the Prime Minister of Georgia, and Mr. Sandro Kavsadze, Mr. Shevardnadze's Personal Representative and Chairman of the Committee for Human Rights and Inter-Ethnic Relations. In Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, the mission met with Mr. Thamaz Nadareishvili, the Prime Minister of the local government and Chairman of the Military Council, which remain loyal to the Government in Tbilisi. The mission also met with representatives of the Committee for Salvation of Abkhazia and with members of the Council of National Unity. In Gudauta, the seat of the Abkhaz party, the mission had meetings with Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba, the Chairman of the local Supreme Council, and his associates. Before returning to Tbilisi, the mission conferred with General Giorgi Karkarashvili, the Minister of Defence of Georgia. In Tbilisi, the mission had another round of meetings with Mr. Shevardnadze, Mr. Sigua and Mr. Kavsadze. It also met other Georgian authorities and representatives of the diplomatic corps in Tbilisi.

3. After his mission to Georgia, Ambassador Brunner travelled to Stockholm to consult with Mrs. Margaretha af Ugglas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden and Chairman-in-Office of the Council of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), as well as with Ambassador Istvan Gyarmati of Hungary, the Personal Representative for Georgia of the CSCE Chairman-in-Office.

4. Following his talks with the CSCE representatives, my Special Envoy proceeded to Moscow, where he met with Mr. Andrei Kozyrev, Minister for Foreign

Affairs of the Russian Federation, and Mr. Boris Pastukhov, Deputy Foreign Minister and Personal Representative of President Yeltsin for Georgia.

The position of the Georgian Government

5. In the talks with the Georgian authorities in Tbilisi and Sukhumi, Ambassador Brunner's interlocutors strongly emphasized their desire that the United Nations should play a major role in reaching a peaceful solution of the conflict in Abkhazia, based on the provisions of the Moscow agreement of 3 September 1992 (see S/24523).

6. The Georgian Government requested the urgent deployment of a group of United Nations military observers (UNMOs) to Abkhazia in order to monitor the cease-fire agreed to by Mr. Shevardnadze and Mr. Yeltsin during their meeting in Moscow on 14 May 1993. The Georgian authorities also expressed their strong wish for the United Nations to play a role in monitoring the withdrawal of armed formations from Abkhazia, as provided for in the agreement of 3 September 1992, as well as the border between Georgia and the Russian Federation.

7. The Georgian Government warmly welcomed the possible convening of a peace conference on the conflict in Abkhazia. Such a conference, held under the auspices of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, should, in their view, take place within the framework of the agreement of 3 September 1992.

The position of the Abkhaz party

8. The Abkhaz authorities in Gudauta, led by Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba, expressed their interest in an active role of the United Nations in reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict in Abkhazia. Concerning the possible deployment of UNMOs, the Abkhaz party expressed the opinion that under present circumstances such a deployment would be premature and that such a step should be part of a comprehensive solution, including the withdrawal from Abkhazia of Georgian troops and irregular forces emanating from the Northern Caucasus region. In this connection, the Abkhaz side also demanded the political reinstatement of what they regarded as the legitimate authorities of Abkhazia.

9. The Abkhaz authorities strongly supported the holding of a United Nations-sponsored peace conference which in their view should be held on the basis of the 3 September 1992 agreement.

The position of the Russian Federation

10. At his meeting in Moscow with Foreign Minister Kozyrev and Deputy Minister Pastukhov, my Special Envoy was told that the Russian Government supported an active role of the United Nations in resolving the conflict in Abkhazia. The Russian side strongly endorsed the idea of an urgent deployment of UNMOs there. At the same time, Minister Kozyrev stated that his Government wished to give further thought to the possible convening of a United Nations peace conference.

11. Subsequently, at a meeting in Vienna on 15 June 1993 which was also attended by Ambassador Brunner, Mr. Kozyrev told me that his Government, at this stage, had serious reservations about a United Nations peace conference on the

conflict in Abkhazia. He stressed that his Government preferred to pursue further regional efforts, under the agreement of 3 September 1992.

II. GEORGIAN REQUEST FOR DEPLOYMENT OF MILITARY OBSERVERS

12. Following these developments, my Special Envoy had a meeting with the Georgian Head of State in Brussels on 22 June 1993. Mr. Shevardnadze again stressed the need for urgent action by the United Nations. He strongly appealed for the immediate dispatch of UNMOs to be deployed in the government-controlled area of Abkhazia. Mr. Shevardnadze emphasized that such a step would be a significant undertaking by the international community to prevent a wider conflagration; if the present conflict could not be halted, it could spread to the entire Caucasus region.

III. OBSERVATIONS

13. The situation in Georgia is deteriorating. Continuing hostilities in Abkhazia are having a devastating effect on the country's economy and making it impossible for the Government to devote the necessary attention and resources to the opportunities resulting from independence. There is an urgent need to bring this conflict under control and negotiate a peaceful settlement.

14. As reported in my letter of 5 May 1993 to the President of the Security Council (see S/25756), I believe that it is necessary to pursue a solution along three tracks: consolidation (and, if necessary, international monitoring) of the cease-fire; the launching of a political negotiating process, preferably under United Nations auspices; and support for these two processes by the neighbouring countries, amongst which the Russian Federation is of pre-eminent importance. My consultations and those of my Special Envoy have revealed that the Georgian Government and its supporters in Sukhumi fully support all aspects of my approach, that the Abkhaz side led by Mr. Ardzinba favours the conference but not, at the present time, the deployment of military observers and that the Russian side favours an UNMO deployment but has reservations about the conference, at any rate at this time.

15. To date my Special Envoy has presented my approach as an integrated package, with the deployment of UNMOs being linked to the launching of a viable political process and vice versa. I share the view, which is often expressed in the Security Council, that the United Nations should think carefully before undertaking a peace-keeping operation which is not linked to a political process with a reasonable prospect of success. Unless this rule is observed, there is a danger of open-ended peace-keeping commitments from which it can be difficult to withdraw without causing new hostilities. I have accordingly been reluctant to recommend the deployment of military observers before I was in a position to inform the Council that all concerned had agreed to engage in negotiation under United Nations auspices. For this reason I decided, after my meeting with Mr. Kozyrev on 15 June 1993, to put on hold the deployment of the five UNMOs referred to in my letter of 9 June 1993 to the President of the Security Council.

16. However, I have come to the conclusion that the maintenance of this position could lead to a further intensification of the conflict, with potentially severe consequences for the whole Caucasus region. The cease-fire agreement of 14 May came into effect on 20 May. It held for the first two weeks or so. But in recent weeks it has been violated daily, especially by Abkhaz shelling of Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, which is still held by forces loyal to the Government. Civilian casualties have been rising. Georgia's Head of State, Mr. Shevardnadze, fears an imminent assault on Sukhumi across the river Gumista which constitutes a no-man's land between the opposing forces to the north of the city itself. He has asked for a preventive deployment of UNMOs to Sukhumi and to Ochamchira, another government-held city which is of critical importance for the defence of Sukhumi, as a first step to deter further escalation of this conflict and help restore the cease-fire. As mentioned above, this proposal is supported by the Russian Federation. The leader of the Abkhaz party in Gudauta has so far expressed reservations about the deployment of UNMOs on territory controlled by his side, but this question would not arise as the proposed deployment would be entirely on the government-controlled side. I would, of course, ask those with influence with the Abkhaz party to ensure that no hostile action was taken against the United Nations personnel and to convince that party to accept, as soon as possible, the deployment of UNMOs on its side also.

17. While being only too conscious of the dangers inherent in deploying United Nations personnel to an area where an agreed cease-fire is not being respected, I believe that the risk is justified in the present case given the urgent need to get the conflict in Abkhazia under control. I accordingly recommend that a Group of 50 UNMOs, under a Chief Military Observer at the Brigadier-General level, should be deployed in Georgia, initially in the Sukhumi and Ochamchira districts of Abkhazia. The Observer Group's mandate would be:

(a) To discourage, by preventive deployment, further escalation of the conflict in Abkhazia, with special reference to the city of Sukhumi;

(b) To use its good offices to reinstate the cease-fire agreement which came into effect on 20 May;

(c) To report and, if possible, investigate cease-fire violations and endeavour to restore the status quo;

(d) To attempt to establish communications between the Georgian and Abkhaz forces with a view to forestalling violations of the cease-fire.

18. If the Security Council endorses the above recommendation, it will be my intention to deploy the 50 UNMOs as soon as the contributing Governments can make them available, given the threatening situation in the Sukhumi district. To make this possible, I would seek the cooperation of the Government of the Russian Federation in making available the necessary logistic support, especially vehicles and radios, on a temporary basis from resources of the former headquarters of the Soviet Union's Transcaucasian Military District which remain in Tbilisi.

19. The deployment of the Military Observer Group would, of course, be without prejudice to my continuing efforts to launch a peace process, involving the

Government of Georgia, the two parties in Abkhazia and the Russian Federation. In accordance with the framework agreement recently concluded on cooperation between the United Nations and the CSCE (see A/48/185), it would be my intention to invite the Chairman-in-Office of the CSCE to be represented as an observer at an eventual peace conference.

20. The preliminary cost estimates for the deployment recommended in paragraph 17 above will shortly be circulated as an addendum to the present report.